



● With focus switching to the staged return to playing at all levels as rugby league emerges from its enforced hibernation, the cost and effects of the pandemic on and off the field are beginning to be assessed, with the possibility that the governing body could be set to go to the government for a third time for financial assistance.

Having already received loan packages worth £16m and £12m, along with access to other Sport England funds for the community arm, justification for the support has been evidenced by the latest update to 2019's Dividend Report, which has evidenced how the sport delivers an annual social impact worth more than £185 million.

Judith Cummins, MP for Bradford South and chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Rugby League, said: "The impact of coronavirus has hit hardest in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

"That's why the selfless efforts of rugby league clubs including many players, staff and volunteers, charities and individual supporters should be recognised for the impact they've had and continue to have in supporting our communities through lockdown and restrictions. They have often been the glue keeping communities together."

One group needing support is disabled players, according to the Activity Alliance, which has also released research on the impact of Covid-19, leading the RFL to pledge to redouble its commitment there.

Findings showed that twice as many disabled people felt the virus greatly reduced their ability to do sport or physical activity compared to non-disabled and led to many feeling 'more fearful and ignored'.

Chris Godfrey, the RFL's social and inclusion manager, said: "This is important and stark research. It challenges all sports think creatively about how everyone can access appropriate activity – even as we face serious restrictions."



Lights, cameras – action: As we await a new season, the game is getting its act together community-wise SWPix.com

# The people's sport



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● In similar vein, RLWC2021 has announced Assura PLC as official Community Health Partner, further underlining their commitment to creating positive social impacts.

Warrington-based Assura, a FTSE 250 company, has a portfolio of almost 600 primary care medical centres and NHS bases serving millions of people across the UK.

The sponsorship is their first in

sport and the Assura Community Fund will launch a grants programme with a minimum of £100,000 available to help charitable and voluntary sector organisations deliver health and wellbeing activities around the tournament.

On top of all that, RFL vice-president Mike Smith has issued a rallying call for rugby league to help address the digital exclusion facing many children and young people.

He has written to all clubs, highlighting the divide between families whose children have access to laptops and wifi for home learning and those who do not.

● The RFL has announced a new seven-person Inclusion Board, under chair and non executive director Rimla Akhtar MBE, as part of its commitment to diversity, inclusion and anti-discrimination.

Its members are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds such as education, the media, business and retail, and includes Huddersfield Giants player Michael Lawrence.

They will oversee progress of TACKLE IT, the plan which sets out how the sport will extend its reach and appeal, diversify its talent pool, improve its culture and actively deal with discrimination.

● Referee Michael Smaill has been appointed to head the RFL's Lead the Game initiative, which aims to encourage more Armed Forces veterans to get involved with match officiating at all levels.

"I'm excited to be part of such a positive development," he said.

"Jack Smith, who will be an ambassador for the project, is a great example of the sort of talent we are hoping to discover." ▶



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